

WILD OIL BOOM DAYS IN TEXAS

WHEN FORTUNES WERE QUICKLY MADE OR LOST IN BEAUMONT

GAMBLING IN THE TOP-PRairie That Followed the Discovery of Oil in the Gulf Coast—From \$1.75 to \$200,000 an Acre—Exciting Scenes of the Boom Days.

A few years ago a Texas with a few odd dollars to invest and nothing particular to do in the Lone Star State, a few miles from Beaumont, might have put the money into the good timber land or rice-growing country, which abounds there, but, of course, he couldn't get that land at \$1.75 an acre, which was the price he paid for the barren prairie property he did acquire.

This man never could explain to himself or to any one else why he bought this land, and his friends came to look upon him as a harmless egotist, who wanted to own a bit of land for the mere sake of owning it. It was hard to find any other reason, for the tract he bought wasn't even half-way decent grazing ground, although some folks used it for that purpose.

The friends of the man who had thus become a property owner, gazed him unmercifully about his estate. Every time they met him they had some sarcastic thing to say about his magnificent holdings on the prairie, and finally it occurred to him that he might be a sort of chump, and he resolved to get rid of that real estate as soon as he could.

A New England Yankee with cattle-raising notions and a few thousand dollars, came along and offered him \$6 an acre for the land. The Texan hated to rob him, but had the old-fashioned notion that everything is fair in a land deal, and besides it was such a chance to huck back at his friends some of the things they had projected in his direction, that he closed with the Yankee at a profit of \$4.25 an acre.

He told the story to his friends between drinks and they congratulated him on his shrewdness, although it was just hard luck for them to see a man who had been so successful in his direction, that he had closed with the Yankee at a profit of \$4.25 an acre.

A few months later the New England Yankee sold one acre of that land back to the Texan for \$55,000 and a few days after that the Texan passed that one little acre along to a man from New York for \$65,000. The price of that same acre climbed considerably higher before it settled down and several men made fortunes out of it.

And it wasn't the only acre which did acrobatic stunts either, because shortly after that Texan got rid of his burden at \$6 an acre, the oil boom came to Beaumont, and there was a rush of men and capital into southeastern Texas, which sent prices soaring skyward and in a few weeks made hundreds of poor men rich and not a few rich men poor.

The new oil country has crowded a heap of history into a few brief months, some of it creditable but a great deal of it anything but creditable. It has finally settled down to business with about the usual percentage of swindling operations and the usual percentage of legitimate enterprises to be found in a new country which opens up a new field for speculation and the discovery of some of the earth's hidden riches in its land, and the sudden introduction of foreign capital and bustling business men into its affairs.

There are individuals and corporations at work in the new Texas oil fields to-day trying to get the precious petroleum from the ground with the serious object of marketing it in a legitimate way, but there are many, many others who are engaged in the discovery of a gusher or good pump well, is a matter of indifference, save for the added excitement over the country which follows the dissemination of such news.

THE OIL SPECULATION.

To these people the oil excitement is a means to an end. It furnishes them an opportunity to acquire a little land near enough to the oil field to make it possible that it can be found on it, form a company, advertise it extensively and then sell stock far and wide at a trifling price, which brings the chance for speculation within the reach of the poorest wage earner in the country.

There are all sorts of operators of swindling operators who have formed oil companies with no intention of ever going after oil, but it also has a great body of legitimate oil men, some of whom have struck oil already, and others of whom will surely strike it sooner or later, who are marketing their product and making money for themselves and those who have invested with them.

There is no lack of money for those who are honestly drilling for oil in the neighborhood of Beaumont, and there is no lack of faith in the future among the men who are doing the drilling. The oil men who have come back here from Beaumont after studying the situation in the new field seem very confident that the supply will last for a great many years and that only a small part of the oil which is being struck at various depths, has yet been discovered.

Of course the striking of oil in this remote corner of the country has brought great changes here, but what amazed the men who knew the country around Beaumont before the oil boom is the rapidity with which the changes have been made. From a quiet slow going little Texas town, the entire wealth of which was in lumber and rice growing, Beaumont has become a busy city, with a population of 10,000 and a floating population of 5,000 and scores of new buildings.

On the prairie, about Spindle Top, the changes are even greater, for the scrubby ground which grudgingly gave up a bare subsistence to the poor stock raiser, is dotted with the shelter frames of the drill derricks, huge storage tanks and work houses, sheds and cabins. The pipes of the oil wells run in every direction. "Pass, twenty-four miles away, and Port Arthur, fourteen miles away, and by this means much of the product of the derrick is already being rapidly marketed in the North by means of tank steamers.

PRICES GO SOARING.

Beaumont went through some very interesting changes in a few brief months. It saw days and nights of tremendous excitement, when men and women went crazy with the fever of speculation, and the streets were full of day were not nearly enough for the people to finish the work they had to do.

Fortunes were made in a few minutes in land speculation, and a few hundred dollars would change ownership a score of times in a day, and with the last transfer being a price several hundred per cent. higher than in the first. The man who had bought the land who had sold it in two minutes, by announcing that he had it, and whoever thought it could turn around and sell it again with any trouble at a higher figure than he paid for it.

It didn't matter where it was situated so long as it was within fifty miles of the oil fields, and no one bothered to inquire about title or to attend to any of the details of transfer usually observed in real estate transactions. Hundreds of men made fortunes in a few days, and the money, without ever having been seen of him or caring about one.

The men who got on the scene early, with a few hundred dollars in their pockets, bought the best land with it that the natives had to offer and of course got it at a small rate. The natives couldn't know that

for months, every train that came into the city was loaded to the platforms with men who were willing to pay almost anything for land, and so they snatched at the first offers that they got. And the wilder was the more money the native, who had never in his wildest moments figured his property as worth more than \$20 an acre.

GAMBLING IN LAND.

But the early arrivals benefited by the index of late comers. They sold their land to them and in many cases bought it back again a day or so later at several thousand dollars more an acre, without knowing that it was the same land they had sold once before, themselves.

To turn around and sell it again at another profit was an easy matter, though, so they did it with a good deal of frequency, which was a gamble pure and simple and was promoted and kept up by men who didn't care a rap about the oil or the land, but who saw a profitable source of excitement, went on until of course the inevitable end of it all came, and the bottom dropped out of everything.

Then, of course, thousands of dollars were lost by the fellows who were late to buy and couldn't find any one to take their land off their hands. On the whole, though, Beaumont was a good deal more than one would expect considering the heights to which the gamble went.

New York men who went to Beaumont in the midst of all this excitement over land and oil, say that they never saw anything like the scenes which were to be seen in the Gulf Coast. They went to Beaumont in connection with a financial institution and had no part in the excitement, says a spectator, told a SUN reporter, that nothing that he had seen was more interesting than the spectacle of the Texas farmers who had for years owned all the land about Beaumont and who had gone to the first speculators that came along.

FARMERS LOST THEIR CHANCE.

This side of the picture has considerable pathos to it. These farmers had toiled for years, eking out a bare existence, and then they owned great tracts of land worth only a few dollars an acre, unless it happened to have timber on it.

They were drug on their hands and when the first of the boomers came along and finding Spindle Top and all the immediately adjoining property areas in the oil business there, the farmers who promoted the early drilling for oil in the region, offered what seemed fabulous prices for their land, they didn't know what they were doing. They were so excited that they sold the value of that property go up until in some cases it brought as much as \$100,000 an acre.

Some of the farmers who sold their land and some of them will never get over the blow of having lost the only chance they ever had or are ever likely to have of making a fortune.

A great many conservative observers of those weeks of excitement in and around Beaumont say that more money was made in the oil speculation than in any other business in five years in the oil business there. It certainly was a lively time, an almost unbelievable time, for the fellows who held on to the land long enough to profit.

And some of these men will win out yet. Many of them have already formed oil companies and are drilling for oil. They are, more reluctantly own, it is true, and they will probably recoup themselves by subscriptions to their cheap stock if they do not by the time the oil boom is over.

PATILLO HIGGINS'S IDEA.

There isn't very much to say about Beaumont before the oil boom save what has already been said, that it was a quiet lumber and rice town with a few well-to-do people. There was a man named Patillo Higgins there, though, who was a student of geology and considerable of a hustler and who thought he saw signs of oil in the neighborhood.

Nacogdoches county, a hundred miles away, oil had been struck before the war, and a good quality of lubricating and light oil had been produced. Higgins had the idea that since the oil discoveries at Beaumont interest has been revived in the Nacogdoches county, and new wells are to be sunk there very soon.

Despite the fact that southwestern Texas was known to contain oil from the existence of the Nacogdoches county, Higgins, a neighboring county, Beaumont wouldn't take Patillo Higgins seriously. It looked upon him as a harmless crank, and he laughed at the idea of him coming out on the prairie to study the ground.

But by and by Higgins got one or two men interested in the oil question, among them a man named Captain John W. Spindle, who had been a geologist and who went to go out on a light rig about four miles from Beaumont, known as Spindle Top, and bore into the earth at a point selected by Higgins as promising.

CAPT. LUCAS'S WELL.

Beaumont looked on this venture as a good joke, and parties would go out to inspect the work and laugh at the workers. But the luck of the draw was in the venture, though, and thus enormous money was raised to continue the work, but no one, not even Lucas, had much faith in the venture. It was only a few days of work they got down 1,100 feet into the bowels of the earth, and hadn't even struck the cap rock.

At the end of the hole which covers all oil in the earth, and when you strike that you've got oil. You may have to bore a lot more before you get through the cap rock, but you're sure to get it sooner or later if you strike cap rock.

After the first few weeks of drilling on Spindle Top, Lucas and the men knocked off and went to supper. They were discouraged and worn out, and the men who were working on the well, and Lucas, who was seriously considering giving the thing up.

Just as they were sitting down to supper the well, and rushing to the door the men saw a sight which filled their hearts with joy, and set them screaming with sheer excitement. The top of the well was spouting over a hundred feet in the air.

It was coming out at the rate of 50,000 barrels a day, and the men were all over the lake at the foot of the hill. It defied all efforts to stop it and Lucas and his associates were in despair. They had hoped the well would be a dry one, but they were not prepared to conceal a gusher like this.

BOOMERS ARRIVE.

For nine days the oil gushed from the well, and on the fourth day the great lake at the foot of the hill caught fire and lighted up the country for miles around. That was the last straw.

It was the day that oil had been struck at Beaumont, and the excitement began. On the ninth day the oil was controlled and the well has been working ever since.

Investigation of the Lucas well showed that just before the men quit for supper on that memorable night the drill had struck a large pocket of oil, and the men were invited to subscribe when they had no intention to do so at any time of trying to produce and market oil.

JOHN W. GATES IN BEAUMONT.

DALLAS, TEX., Feb. 9.—John W. Gates, the Steel Trust magnate of Chicago, got into the oil business in the Gulf Coast last evening and went to Port Arthur, on the Gulf coast to-day, where he was joined by Rod Oliver of Dallas, W. T. Campbell of Houston, and other prominent oil men and representatives of the Hogg-Swayne syndicate. Mr. Gates has his eye on a big pipe line scheme. His visit to Texas is the result of a recent visit to Chicago of Mr. Campbell.

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There are still thirty-five mobile British columns roaming over the veldt in search of Boer commandos, but when the list of weekly captures was taken to work out at about one Boer and a dozen head of cattle a week for each column, it was felt that something should be done to give a fillip to their mobility. They were ordered to discard pianos, kitchen ranges and sofas from their fighting equipment.

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FOREIGN RAPID-FIRE GUNS.

New French, German and Russian Field Pieces Compared.

In view of the fact that a board of officers is now at work at the proving grounds, Sandy Hook, N. J., testing various models of field guns with a view to adopt the best for our service, it may be of interest to compare the latest models of field guns now in use by the three great European nations, Germany, France and Russia.

The models tested at Sandy Hook are the Vickers-Somson and Maxim, the Cockerill-Nordenfled, the Ehrhardt, the American Ordnance Company, the Driggs-Seabury Gun Company, the Army Ordnance long and short recoil, and finally the Lewis gun, the device of Capt. I. N. Lewis, A. T. Corps. The Armstrong, Krupp and Creusot guns are not represented.

Gen. Sacharov, chief of the General Staff of the Russian Army, while attending the French Army maneuvers of 1901, spoke of the excellent qualities of the new French gun, at the same time referring to the new German gun as being already obsolete. His remarks naturally attracted considerable attention and led the military authorities to estimate the relative values of the field pieces of the three most prominent nations very carefully.

The German, French and Russian guns have, respectively, the following characteristics: Date of construction, 1897, 1897 and 1900; caliber, 7.7, 7.5 and 7.6 cm. (3.03, 2.95 and 2.99 inches); weight, 1,720, 1,800 and 1,804 kg. (3,794, 3,960 and 3,969 pounds); number of shots per minute, 6, 6 and 6; muzzle velocity, 430, 510 and 510 m. per second (1,000, 1,163 and 1,200 feet per second); carriage, rigid, upper and lower, upper and lower; recoil, quick, spade and spade; brake, spade and hydraulic brake.

The date of construction is, of course, in general way an indication of the present state of the gun, but is not necessarily exact. It depends upon the time that has elapsed between the inception of the ideas at the proving grounds and the actual construction and execution of the work. The fundamental lines on which the French gun, for example, was built were decided upon in 1890, but it may be older than the German.

The question of calibre is still a disputed point, and although the French claim that a calibre of 7.5 cm. is the best, the Germans, who are a matter of 7.6 cm. centimetres, that is a matter that can only be settled by actual war experience. In the comparison of weights above given, the French gun is the lightest, but it is not to be considered; but it must be remembered that with a heavy piece the total weight may be considerably lowered by reducing the number of rounds of ammunition carried in the gun, and that is just what the French have done. The weights of the pieces in battery are respectively 820, 1,000 and 1,000 kg. (1,800, 2,200 and 2,200 pounds), which is greatly in favor of the German gun, and was the main reason for its adoption.

The weight given for the Russian gun refers to the Putlov piece, now in use in Russia. The maximum allowable weight for a field gun has been fixed by the military experts to be 950 kg. (2,000 pounds), and the German is the only one fulfilling this condition; nevertheless, it is not in a modern sense a field gun, because of its weight. Its lightness, however, permits it to move rapidly from its position in column of march to the line of fire and to take up its position in the line of battle.

A reaction is taking place in military circles in regard to muzzle velocity, and it is worth noting that although French guns have a muzzle velocity of 510 m. per second, the Russian guns have 600 m. per second, the French themselves, after numerous trials, have decided to reduce muzzle velocity to 430 m. per second. High muzzle velocity interferes with the construction of carriages of great stability, and after all are not of such great value as the French gun, which is a first sight. With a very high muzzle velocity the drop in velocity (owing to the relatively high resistance of the air for the Russian gun) is very great at first, so that the difference in striking velocity at fighting ranges, for any two different muzzle velocities, is not very great. Thus, at 2,000 yards the Russian gun has a muzzle velocity of only 300 m. per second, the muzzle velocity from 1,800 to 1,650 foot-seconds will make a difference in striking velocity of only about thirty foot-seconds, which is not a very great difference.

The French carriage has shields, but these add considerably to the weight, and after all protect only a few of the cannon; besides, they render the pieces more readily visible to the enemy.

The question of rapidity of fire is, of course, very important under certain conditions, but it is not a matter of great importance in the case of field guns. The rapidity of fire is not a matter of great importance in the case of field guns. The rapidity of fire is not a matter of great importance in the case of field guns.

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